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AFGHANISTAN

STABILITY IN KEY AREAS (SIKA) – EAST

HIGHLIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Female participants from Logar Province, International Women's Day, March 8, 2014

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SUMMARY



Female Participants from Logar Province, International Women's Day, March 8, 2014

On March 8 and 9, SIKA-East supported Directorates of Women's Affairs (DoWA) in Logar, Ghazni, Maydan Wardak, Paktya and Khost to host province-wide events in recognition of International Women's Day (March 8, 2014). Similar events in Maydan Wardak, Paktya and Khost took place on March 9th. Nearly 2,000 participants – 1,549 women and 409 men – attended the events across the five provinces. Women made up an overwhelming 80% of the participants, a huge success for women's inclusion.

These events brought together a wide spectrum of government authorities, elected representatives, societal leaders, and civil society actors. All five events garnered media coverage from local TV and radio outlets, which supported even broader dissemination of these events to those men and women who could not attend. Coverage of the event was provided by media partners such as TOLO TV, RTA, Salam Watandar, an Radio Killid; to name a few. In all five of the provinces, representatives from MRRD and IDLG were present to show their support. In certain provinces, such as Logar, Wardak, and Khost, the Provincial Governor addressed attendees and signaled to a strong commitment - and in some instances, a pledge - to devote more attention to female inclusion.

In Afghanistan, women remain hugely underrepresented in sub-national governance structures and institutions. The problem is not a lack of willingness to be involved; rather, and quite unfortunately, women's leadership capacity is often unrecognized and unrewarded. Strengthening female voices, representation, and leadership were key themes emphasized in this year's International Women's Day events. SIKA-East recognizes that the 'voice' end of the spectrum must begin with creating the pre-conditions for voice; that is through awareness-raising and building the capacity to mobilize. These events that took place across the five provinces created a platform for building the capacity of women to mobilize around their needs and concerns, and increased access to important sub-national governance institutions, such as Line Directorates and Provincial Governors.

International Women's Day events hosted in the five SIKA-East provinces provided a rare forum for influential women from the districts to interact with senior GIRoA authorities. It provided an opportunity to highlight issues that were cited as some of the key sources of conflict during district planning sessions – the lack of livelihood opportunities for women, harmful traditional practices, and inadequate access to health and education services. For many local women, this was the first opportunity to directly engage provincial and district officials on their concerns and a rewarding corollary to SIKA-East district planning sessions. Additionally, the gatherings provided greater exposure for local DoWA offices that serve as the primary – and in some cases the only – trusted representative of women in these districts.

In each of the five provinces, female DDA+ members took to the podium to share their perspectives and experiences working to address issues that have been raised by women in their districts, through SIKA-East facilitated sessions. Many of the female DDA+ members conveyed the importance of their perceived increase in capacity gained through SIKA-East capacity building initiatives; particularly with their abilities to address government officials to advocate on behalf of other women in their community. Others shared their perspectives on the value of male allies and the influence they can yield on prioritizing concerns, such as addressing harmful traditional practices. Several of the DDA+ members who spoke saw the events as an opportunity to address religious leaders and call on them to take action.

To ensure continued engagement of female leaders and their greater participation in key governance processes at the district and provincial levels, with support of MRRD and IDLG, SIKA-East will facilitate follow-on Action Summits in each province (“*Jalsas*”) to review progress on government action concerning the issues raised, deepen the dialogue with key line departments and improve cross-district networking. Finally, the program will continue regular advocacy and lobbying training efforts for female DDA+ members to help them develop confidence and acquire concrete skills to effectively engage in the governance process, both as participants and decision-makers, advocate for their interests, concerns and needs, and influence and benefit from public services.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM GHAZNI, LOGAR, MAYDAN WARDAK, PAKTYA, AND KHOST PROVINCES

Ghazni Province

In Ghazni Province, more than 300 participants attended, of whom 190 were female (63%). The event was held in the provincial capital of Ghazni, with women mobilizing from Andar, Jaghatu, Dih Yak, Khwaja Umari, and Qarabagh districts. Local media outlets were present at the event, including Salam Watandar TV, TOLO, RTA, Radio Kilid, and Ghaznawan TV. This media coverage was hailed as a significant success by those participants who attended, with recognition by the media’s interest in broadcasting the event. Invited panelists focused on the theme of women’s rights from an Islamic perspective. The forum also provided a unique opportunity for female attendees with access to sub-national governance institutions, like PRRD, DoWA, and the Education Directorate.



International Women’s Day Event, March 8, Ghazni Province

Invited Panelist Speakers: In addition to Mrs. Shookorya Wali, DoWA representative, speakers included Ms. Habiba Rezayee, Member of Ghazni Youth Organization; Mr. Qazi Haqdad, Head of the Court of Appeals in Ghazni Provincial Court; Ms. Koobra Sadaat, a member of a Ghazni women’s organization; Ms. Fazila, Qarabagh, DDA+ member; and Mavlavi Abdul Hakim, Director of Haj and Religious Affairs. Representatives of the Directorates of Health, the Directorate of Education, PRRD, DoWA, Sectoral Services, and Security also participated.

Qazi Haqdad, Head of the Court of Appeals in Ghazni, highlighted the importance of women’s access to the justice systems and emphasized women’s rights. He spoke specifically about women’s rights to *mahr*, guaranteed under Islam (*mahr* is akin to social insurance, an unconditional payment of money or property to a wife). In addition, he shared that *walwar*, or dowry, was deemed a harmful practice that was both un-Islamic as well as difficult to mediate through the courts.

Female DDA+ Members addressed the audience and congratulated women’s achievements in Ghazni Province. DDA+ Members spoke to the audience about women’s participation and inclusion in SIKA-East activities, particularly women’s participation and involvement of women in the stability planning phase that lead to the creation of the District Project Portfolios. She also shared examples of some of the successful initiatives that were led by the Ghazni Women’s Communications Committee.

Logar Province

In Logar Province, more than 628 citizens participated, 520 of whom were female (83%). The event was held in the provincial capital of Pul-e-Alam, with women mobilizing from Kulan Ghor and Pul-e-Alam areas as well as Mohammad Agha, Khoshi, and Baraki Barak districts. DoWA secured additional funding from the Provincial Governor's office to cover costs for the higher number of participants. In addition to district women, guests included members of the Provincial Council, representatives of the Office of Immigration and Directorate of Public Health, and local students. Media coverage included Afghan National TV, Shamshat TV, Atifaq Radio, and Zenat Radio.



International Women's Day Event, March 8, Logar Province

Violence against women and harmful traditional practices were issues highlighted and prioritized by women in Logar Province, and these themes were indeed addressed during the International Women's Day forum. Ms. Shema Zargar, DoWA Director, took the opportunity to share a tragic story about a young woman, 22-year-old Nafisa, who hung herself in Logar three weeks ago. Investigation by the local security forces showed that she took this fatal step in response to pressures associated with a looming forced marriage. This harsh situation resonated quite strongly with many of the women in attendance. As one of the female participants shared, "This experience was important to hear about. It shows us why we should never force our girls to marry."

Invited Panelist Speakers: In addition to Ms. Shema Zargar the Director of DoWA, additional esteemed speakers included Mr. Niaz Mohammad Ameer, Provincial Governor; Dr. Abdul Wakeel, Head of the Provincial Council; Mr. Rahmatullah Sarwari, Head of PRRD; Ms. Fawzia, DDA+ member; Mr. Deen Mohammad, Representative from the Directorate of Hajj and Religious Affairs; and Mr. Shah Rahman, SIKA-East Provincial Manager.

Having support from sub-national governance structures like the Provincial Governors Office, as well as having the presence of religious leaders, spoke volumes to the women in attendance. Their presence demonstrated both an appreciation and recognition of women's roles and leadership in the community – something which has been historically overlooked. Logar's Provincial Governor, Niaz Mohammad Amir, opened the event by highlighting the importance of recruiting women to work in government offices. Given the lack of employment opportunities for women in Logar and the economic strain placed on families, he pledged to increase female staff in the Provincial Governor's Office and encouraged all Line Directorates to do the same. Focusing on women's rights from an Islamic perspective, a representative from the Directorate of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Deen Mohammed, spoke about women's rights to access family inheritance according to Islamic law and used the podium to encourage men to support women's rights. Mr. Wali Wakil, Head of the Provincial Council spoke about the importance of women in the home and society and highlighted the need for their participation in government affairs.

Mr. Rahmatullah Sarwari, Head of PRRD, stated that according to GIRoA gender policies, women should be empowered to participate in decision-making and in finding solutions to address issues in the community. Ms. Fawzia, DDA+ member, spoke about district activities facilitated by SIKA-East and highlighted women's increased role in planning, advocacy, and other processes, which they had rarely participated in before. Mr. Shah Rahman, SIKA-East PMT Manager, emphasized that both men and women should have equal rights and all government institutions and international organization needed to enable this.

Khost Province

In Khost Province, more than 450 participants attended, of whom 420 were female (93%). DoWA secured additional funding from Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) as well as a locally-based NGO, called TEST. The event was held in the provincial capital, with women mobilizing from the provincial capital and surrounding districts. Local media outlets were present at the event, including Tolo TV, Shamsat TV, Ariana TV, and Gharghasht TV. Radio outlets were also present, including Radio Killid, Radio Khost, Radio Walsguag, Radio Chanar, Heeli Karwan Radio, and Ashna Radio (otherwise known as Voice of America), and BBC.



Female DDA+ Member. Khost Province. International Women's Day

Invited Panelist Speakers: In addition to Ms. Khawar Ameri, Director of DoWA, participants included Mr. Abdul Jabar, Khost Provincial Governor; Ms. Kamla Akbari, Media Manager of DoWA; Mr. Shah Mohammad, a senior religious Leader; Ms. Sahira Sharif, Khost Parliamentarian; Ms. Mahbooba Sadad, DDA+ Representative; Mr. Amer Baher, University Professor; Mr. Janmer Zazi, Provincial Council Member; and Ms. Zarmena Shams, Human Rights Commission. Invited guests included Provincial Council members and the Directorate of Culture and Information.

Khost is a province that has one of the highest levels of female participation in the DDA, and generally, people from the districts in Khost are supportive of access to girls' education. Sub-national governance institutions, like the Provincial Governor as well as Line Directorates are open to dialogue on issues that are of pertinent concern for women in Khost. At the event, Mr. Abul Jabar, Provincial Governor, applauded the significant transformation in women's lives in Khost over the past decade. He recognized that although much has been accomplished, efforts must be sustained to continue to achieve even more gains. He added that he fully supports women from Khost in working to address traditional harmful practices, including *baad*, and recognized the importance of religious leaders preaching about this issue through mosques in support of women. He also discussed inheritance issues for women that needed to be addressed. Mrs. Khawar Ameri, Director of DoWA, shared a message from the Minister of Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and pointed to the importance of working along with other sub-national governance institutions, such as other Line Directorates as well as the Provincial Governor. Mr. Shah Mohammad, a Representative of the Directorate for Haj and Religious Affairs spoke about the role of Islam in preserving women's rights, particularly discussing issues regarding women's rights to inheritance, taking an active role in politics and governance, and access to education – all issues that are supported in the Quran and Hadith. He called on men in the communities to support women and their participation.

In Khost, women are quite active in the Provincial Council, parliamentary representation, in the DDA, as well as women who are employed through specific Line Directorate. One example is Ms. Sahira Sharif, a Parliamentarian from Khost. She used the opportunity to address the audience by highlighting the advancements made for women in Khost - particularly in girls' access to education. In 2002, Khost was home to only two girls' schools and only one female teacher. Today, Khost has many schools for girls and has many girls who have graduated from high school. Ms. Mahbooba Sadad, a DDA+ representative, spoke to the attendees about their experiences communicating their needs and concerns with the Provincial Governor and District Governor, and attributed the increase in their capacity to the knowledge gained from SIKa-East trainings. She also talked about the value of male allies and their support, and the influence it can have on gaining traction in addressing needs and concerns prioritized by women in the community. Recognition of women's abilities to engage effectively with government

entities and other institutions - institutions to which they never had access to before – points to a marked success in women’s access and influence to decision-making and identifying solutions.

Paktya Province

In Paktya Province, more than 200 participants attended, of whom 149 were female (75%). DoWA secured additional funding from UNAMA, UNHCR, and the Afghan Women’s Education Center (AWEC). The event was held in the provincial capital of Paktya. Local media outlets were present at the event, including Paktya Press Club, Awshtun Radio, Paktya GHAKA Radio, SHZO GHAKA Radio Azadi Radio, BBC, and Paktya MILE Radio & TV. In addition to women who attended from the surrounding districts, guests also included Representatives of PRRD and the Directorates of Justice as well as Information & Culture; members of the Provincial Council; the Director of the Election Commission; a representative of UNCHR; representatives from AWEC as well as other civil society organizations; and influential tribal elders.



International Women’s Day Event, March 9, Paktya Province

Invited Panelist Speakers: In addition to Ms. Nasreen Oryakhil, Acting DoWA Director, speakers included Mr. Jan, UNAMA representative; Ms. Shaista Jan Ahadi, Head of Provincial Council; Mr. Mohammad Laiq Mangal, Provincial Council Member; Mr. Noor Ahmad Shamim, Regional Director of AIHRC, Paktya; Ms. Jamila Ghranai and Zarmina, influential local activists; Mr. Zalmai Oryakhil, Chief of Paktya Police Department; Ms. Lila Ahmad, a Female DDA+ Member; and Mr. Haji Hazrat Gul Barikzai, SIKA-East PMT Manager.

Paktya is a province where SIKA-East has made an effort to make inroads with influential leaders to increase female participation and inclusion. Ahmad Abad, one of the six districts in Paktya, is the only district which hails active female representation in the DDA. Recognizing International Women’s Day in a conservative province like Paktya was a particularly important platform to create the pre-conditions for voice, awareness-raising and building the capacity to mobilize. Ms. Nasreen Oryakhil, Acting Director of DoWA, shared a message of the Minister of Women Affairs and warmly acknowledged support from donors who stepped forward to provide support for the day’s event. Mr. Jan, a representative from UNAMA, said that women’s participation should be encouraged; and that women’s political participation in the upcoming presidential elections was an opportunity for women to make their voices heard. Mr. Noor Ahmad “Shamim”, Regional Director of Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), shared perspectives on women’s rights in Afghanistan according to Islam. He emphasized that Islam ensures women’s rights to inheritance, choice in marital engagement, and education and health, among many other rights. He emphasized that leaders and citizens should carefully ensure women’s positive place in society and briefly described the human rights situation in Paktya.

Paktya is an example where unfortunately women’s leadership capacity that is present in informal roles goes unrecognized. SIKA-East’s initiatives in Paktya have been structured in such a way to identify key influential female members of the community – be that through activists, teachers, or respected women in the community. It has also been critical to gain support through influential male members of the community – tribal elders, religious leaders, and government officials; for example – to encourage support to female participation. Two examples of the types of female leaders in the community are two activists, Jamila Ghranai and Zarmina. These two women addressed the audience to address women’s rights under Islam and urged tribal elders to support women and their role and leadership in addressing concerns in the community. Lila Ahmad, female DDA member from Ahmad Abad

District pointed to the inclusion of women in different SIKA-East activities, and the positive achievements the program has made for women in her district. Ms. Shaista-jan Ahadi, a Provincial Council member, spoke about the importance of women's engagement, participation, and inclusion. She added that leaders from Paktya, both male and female, need to work together to support women's access to education and health; and above all, support their aspirations. Mr. Mohammad Laiq Mangal, Provincial Council Member, spoke about the roles and responsibilities of tribal elders and government, while also encouraging women to pursue education for a brighter future.

An interesting element of the Paktya celebration for International Women's Day was a panelist from Paktya's police department – a department within the government whose consideration of women's issues is critical to their security, as well as the willingness to participate. Mr. Zalmay Oryakhil, Chief of Paktya Police Department, strongly encouraged women to register for police positions to serve the Afghan people, assuring them that the police would facilitate their participation. He also urged them to participate in the elections and make their voices heard through voting; and assured them that the police would be diligently working to ensure good security.

Maydan Wardak Province

In Maydan Wardak Province, more than 380 participants attended, of whom 270 were female (74%). The event was held in Maydan Shah, the provincial capital, with women mobilizing from all four SIKA-East districts. Local media outlets were present at the event, including Afghan National TV, Ariana TV, and Benawa Radio.

Invited Panelist Speakers: In addition to Ms. Mena Ahmadi, Director of DoWA, speakers included Mr. Jawad Jan, Head of the Office of the Provincial Governor; Mr. Akbar Jan and Mr. Sadiq, senior religious leaders; Dr. Hanifa, a Representative of the Directorate of Public Health; and Ms. Wajia Akhterzai, DDA+ member.



International Women's Day Event, March 9, Wardak Province

Invited panelists focused on several themes in the Wardak celebration of International Women's Day – including the importance of women's participation in political processes, women's access to services, as well as the role of women's rights from an Islamic perspective. SIKA-East's support in Maydan Wardak looks to provide opportunities that enable female representation and participation in decision-making that affects them. Ms. Mena Ahmadi, DoWA Director, encouraged women to participate in the upcoming elections and to become active in other political spheres. Religious leaders exercise significant influence over communities, which is why it is important to have them as panelists. Their perspectives are taken very seriously amongst the district population, and the forum provided an excellent opportunity for these perspectives to be shared with nearly 400 people from across Wardak province. Mr. Sadiq, a religious leader from Wardak, forthrightly stated that women's rights are protected under Islam; and that Islam does not forbid girls and women's access to education, nor does it forbid women from working outside the home. He also explained that a woman has the right to inherit the property of her husband and father.

SIKA-East also supports initiatives that facilitate equitable opportunities to women and men to obtain public information and improved access to basic services. The opportunity to have representatives speak to the audience from the Directorate of Public Health and the Attorney General's Office was incredibly valuable – given the importance that access to health services and awareness of women's rights are priority issues for women in

Wardak. Dr. Hanifa spoke about women's health and maternal mortality; and called for health facilities to be made available in areas that lacked access. Mr. Qari Abdul Mateen, a representative of the Attorney General's Office raised cases of family disputes and emphasized that men as well as women share responsibility, pointing to the fact that women should not be solely blamed for conflict, as is common practice.

Ms. Wajia Akhterzai, a DDA+ member spoke to the women from Maydan Wardak about her experience working with SIKA-East, particularly highlighting the inclusive efforts made to increase female participation. She spoke about the impact that workshops that provided training in lobbying, advocacy and governance had an influence in the lives of female DDA+ members and the benefit to which these initiatives have had on women's abilities to communicate effectively with government entities to find solutions. Interestingly, Mr. Jawad Jan, a Representative from the Provincial Governor's office, was pleased to learn of the efforts SIKA-East had made to increase women's capacity and requested SIKA-East support for capacity building of women within provincial governance entities.

One of the attendees, Yasmeen, a DDA+ member and also a widow from Maydan Wardak with eight children, shared what she gathered from the day's event. She found the event to be highly beneficial in that she had an opportunity to learn from the panelists and their perspectives on women's rights. She also shared that she has gained a tremendous amount from the training and capacity building initiatives that SIKA-East has lead, as it has contributed to her understanding on different issues impacting her community and effective strategies of communicating with the government on how to address these concerns.